



MT. CULMEN CLARION

A Newsletter of Mt. Culmen EC Church

*"What I tell you in the dark, say in the light;
and what you hear whispered, shout from the rooftops!"*

Volume 7 - Issue 2 - February 2024

Pastor

Rev. Jonathan J. Brown
717-205-6532

Lay Delegate

Rebekah Brown

Alternate Lay Delegate

Kenneth Bannon

Board President

Floyd Mast

Board Vice President

Delrea Ream

Board Secretary

Sharon Mast

Church Treasurer

Esther Stauffer

Trustees:

Floyd Mast
Barry Ream
David Rissler
Brenna Pammer

Stewards:

Esther Stauffer
Joyce Garber
Kim Sweigart

Members-at-Large:

Sharon Mast
Delrea Ream



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Peering from Pisgah

— Rev. Jonathan Brown

Before we pick up our study of the Book of Numbers again (hopefully next month), this month it might be good to peek ahead to the close of Moses' story. The New Testament, looking back, reminds us that *"Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later"* (Hebrews 3:5). But, for reasons we'll eventually learn together, Moses fell short of the promised land; he died while still back in Moabite territory. And the Bible has some interesting things to say about the death of Moses and what happened after it.

So, when Moses died, *"the people of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days"* (Deuteronomy 34:8), after which his successor Joshua commanded three days of preparation (Joshua 1:10); then Joshua led the people across the River Jordan into the Promised Land *"on the tenth day of the first month"* (Joshua 4:19). Calculating back, the rabbis determined that the date of Moses' death must have been the seventh day of the preceding month – which, this year, corresponds to February 16 in our calendar. Yes – we're coming up now on Zayin Adar, the anniversary of Moses' death. ('Zayin' is the seventh letter in the Hebrew alphabet.) But what can we Christians learn from how our Jewish brothers and sisters observe Zayin Adar, and, more importantly (as always), from what the Bible itself says about the last day of Moses?

First, in Jewish practice, Zayin Adar is a common day for fundraisers held by Jewish burial societies, to highlight the importance of their work. And that makes sense, since Scripture seems to ascribe the burial of Moses to God himself: *"He buried him there in the land of Moab opposite Beth-peor, but no one knows the place of his burial to this day"* (Deuteronomy 34:6). (Later Jews envisioned that an angel was tasked with the burial, despite Satan trying to interrupt with slanders against Moses. Jude repeats this traditional story that *"the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, was disputing about the body of Moses."*) Burial societies mark the day with celebration insofar as, since it was a heavenly hand that did the work, human gravediggers had the day off!

In some cases, those Jewish burial societies use this observance as a chance to further honor the deceased whose burials took place in the past year by sharing memories of their lives. (It might not be a bad idea for us to do the same – see the prayer list on page 17.) And in the modern nation of Israel, Zayin Adar functions a bit like our Memorial Day, with special services at military cemeteries. At least, that's what I've heard.

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Mount Culmen Evangelical Congregational Church

1885 Turkey Hill Road, East Earl, PA 17519

Sunday Morning Worship: 10:00 AM

Board Meeting Notes (January 2024)

Last month, the Official Board of Mt. Culmen Evangelical Congregational Church convened its meeting after the worship service on Sunday, January 7, 2024, to conduct the business of the church. In attendance at the meeting were 12 members of our church board: Floyd Mast, Sharon Mast, Del Ream, Barry Ream, Kim Sweigart, Dave Rissler, Esther Stauffer, Joyce Garber, Ian Pammer, Brenna Pammer, Rev. Jonathan Brown, and Rebekah Brown.

Opening with prayer and roll call, the board heard the customary reports.

Of these, the treasurer's report submitted by Esther Stauffer noted:

- December 2023 income of \$6,886.15
- December 2023 expenses of \$5,769.49
- a December 31 ending balance of \$9,518.68

The secretary's report was accepted unanimously on the motion of Kim Sweigart, seconded by Esther Stauffer.

The treasurer's report was accepted unanimously on the motion of Kim Sweigart, seconded by Joyce Garber.

The stewards had nothing to report.

The trustees reported that additional copies of the shed key had been made, and also that Martin Enterprises had come to service the fire extinguishers and found them all in fine working order.

There were no items of old business, properly speaking, for the board to conduct.

Under the heading of new business, the board heard from Esther Stauffer who, in addition to reporting the sad news that the local branch of Truist would be shutting down on March 19, also reported that she had spoken with Darryl Sensenig, who is scheduled for mow for us again next year. Kim Sweigart noted to the board that she is in need of stamps to continue the card ministry of care, but Rebekah Brown said that she had just ordered a large number of stamps for church mailings and would transfer a couple of coils to Kim.

Pastor Jonathan observed that it would not be long until Easter this year, and that our church has the custom, every Holy Saturday, of hosting a pancake-and-sausage breakfast, to be followed by an Easter egg hunt for the children who attend. This year, Holy Saturday will fall on Saturday, March 30, 2024. Pastor Jonathan introduced a motion to schedule the event for that date this year. This motion was seconded by Kim Sweigart and passed unanimously. As our church customarily also produces peanut butter eggs and coconut cream eggs for sale at that time, this began the discussion of when volunteers would begin that process.

Next, the board discussed the role of the stewards in setting up the elements of bread and grape juice prior to each of our quarterly Communion services. It was observed that there are four quarterly Communion services each year, and four stewards. Therefore, it made the most sense to assign each steward a particular one, to best spread out that responsibility. Esther Stauffer had prepared the elements for the first-quarter Communion service (held just before the board meeting), Kim Sweigart volunteered to prepare the elements for the second-quarter Communion service on Easter Sunday, and that left Joyce Garber and Brenna Pammer to decide between them which of them would take the third-quarter Communion service (customarily in July) and which would take the fourth-quarter Communion service (customarily in October). This decision was deferred.

On the topic of communion, a jest was made that, knowing Pastor Jonathan, he probably uses real wine when doing Communion visits. Pastor Jonathan said he doesn't, since it isn't the normal practice at our church (though Pastor Jonathan *does* believe that actual wine is the proper material for Holy Communion, as Jesus commanded; but the pastor defers to our church's practice so as not to rock the boat, until our church is ready to consider that step), but he does choose a nice not-from-concentrate grape juice from the grocery store. He added that he always has a greater challenge keeping bread in stock. As providing the pastor with the elements for Communion is a responsibility of the stewards, the stewards gave him the remaining bread from that morning's Communion service.

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(Continued from Page 2, "Board Meeting Notes")

The board also heard a few matters that would otherwise be discussed at a Pastoral Relations Committee meeting. It was noted that during a recent coffee and donut hour, some church members had raised questions regarding whether it would be possible for the pastor and his wife to arrive at the church earlier on Sunday mornings, instead of five or ten minutes prior to the start of the service. Pastor Jonathan clarified for the board that, after a full week's work of intensive study of the Scriptures (usually producing 50-100 pages of research notes per sermon, due to the biblical centrality of "*prayer and the ministry of the word*" [Acts 6:4]), he is frequently up working Saturdays on his detailed sermon outline until between 1:00am and 2:00am Sunday morning, and then gets up no later than 5:00am to spend several hours writing the sermon, in addition to other essential morning tasks. The only ways for him to *guarantee* his presence much earlier than his usual arrival time would be either (1) to sacrifice an additional half-hour of sleep by getting up at 4:30am, but at the risk of further sleep deprivation, or (2) to shorten his Sunday morning work by sacrificing the time he spends editing the sermon down in length, with the result that the sermon would be longer by perhaps 10-15 minutes each week. The board requested that he not do either.

The board also inquired how things are going with his ministry of visitation, in light of the added burdens on his time due to his enrollment in another graduate program. The names of several shut-ins the board had concerns about were mentioned by board members (although some names listed belong to other churches). Pastor Jonathan clarified for the board that it is indeed true that classes keep him much busier than before. Nonetheless, although the church compensates him for 15 hours per week, he routinely devotes several times that amount to church-related work. Further, he is always extremely happy to spend some of that time in visiting *anyone*, whether a shut-in or not.

For this reason, Pastor Jonathan said, he prints his contact information on the front of every monthly newsletter and in every weekly bulletin, all of which are provided to every church member either in person or by mail. In addition, every quarter, when mailing out the Communion message, he includes a note encouraging anyone to call him when they're ready to receive a visit ("Pastor Jonathan would really love to visit you and bring you Communion!," as the last one said), and once again listing his personal telephone number. This note explains that, because of the spiritual seriousness of Communion (as shown in 1 Corinthians 11:27-29), it is important that the recipient be the one to first judge his or her spiritual preparedness for such a visit. Pastor Jonathan noted that he does his best to visit any Mt. Culmen person who requests to schedule a visit – barring delays due to illnesses or adverse weather. He initiates visits when he can, and listed for the board a few examples, but emphasized that anyone who wants to receive a visit would best be served by extending an invitation to him directly, whether by phone or by mail or in person.

Members of the board thereafter expressed a few notes of appreciation for Pastor Jonathan's ministry at Mt. Culmen.

Finally, one of the board members passed along a suggestion raised during coffee-and-donut hour about why our church doesn't have more summer events, such as music concerts in the pavilion, as other churches in the area do. In discussing the idea, the board observed that one of the issues is that so many nearby churches *do* host music concerts during the summer months already; that time of year is abundant with entertainment options, including Christian music. Furthermore, as Esther noted, even with our established events like our church picnics, only the fact that we get so many donations of goods makes it possible; without those donated goods, if we had to purchase all those supplies and deduct the cost from our proceeds, we wouldn't even be able to cover the costs of the band.

The other obstacle the board noted is that such events, if done right, require more volunteer manpower from the church than just the one or two people who might be willing to take the lead. Will the church as a whole be able and willing to take on that particular project? That's one of the questions the board must always evaluate before saying yes to any particular proposal.

The board therefore decided to encourage anyone with event ideas to attend an upcoming board meeting, to bring their ideas in person so everyone can think through the logistics together and see what might be possible.

There being no further business after that, on motion of Barry Ream, as seconded by Kim Sweigart, the board adjourned its meeting, to reconvene following the worship service on **Sunday, February 4, 2024.**

Annual Congregational Meeting Notes

On Sunday, January 22, 2024, we as a church held our annual congregational meeting. In attendance were 16 church members with voting privileges as well as 4 non-members. The meeting was called to order as part of our worship service, following the sermon and a prayer. Rev. Jonathan J. Brown served as chairman of the meeting. In lieu of holding separate devotions, the congregation approved a motion (made by Esther Stauffer and seconded by Floyd Mast) to count the worship service up to that point as having constituted devotions for the congregational meeting. The congregation next approved a motion (made by Joyce Garber and seconded by Kim Sweigart) to dispense with reading back of minutes of the January 2023 congregational meeting. Nor were there any communications received.

Various officers of the church then made their reports. First, church treasurer Esther Stauffer submitted a financial report covering the year 2023. The report noted 2023's total income as \$67,503.87 (2.51% lower than in 2022), and total expenses for 2023 as \$67,100.67 (0.23% higher than in 2022), resulting in a net financial gain of \$403.20 (less than the gain in 2022), with a year-end balance of \$9,649.93 in our main account (in addition to \$15,000 in our EC investment fund and \$10,567.03 in our certificate of deposit with the Bank of Bird-in-Hand). These figures should be taken in the context of 3.4% inflation during 2023. Esther characterized church finances as "steady."

Of the income received by Mt. Culmen in 2023, \$54,663.30 – or 80.98% – was received as regular offerings for the Sunday worship services. This constituted a lower percentage of total income than in 2022 (81.13%), in part because of an actual 2.69% decrease in Sunday offerings (from \$56,177.11 reported in 2022), but also in large part because of a greater contribution from fundraising events. These fundraisers supplied us with \$9,335.17 (13.83% of 2023 income), more than in 2022 (\$8,808.80, or 12.72%). Moreover, birthday and anniversary gifts bounced back this past year to \$604, exactly what they were in 2021, after a 2022 dip.

Turning her focus to expenses, Esther's report showed that our ministry fund payments to the EC Church increased by 2.14% from 2022 (\$3,706.00 [2023] vs. \$3,628.37 [2022]), although these are calculated as a percent of offerings. In addition, our missions giving increased by 0.76% (\$8,570 [2023] vs. \$8,505 [2022]) – still not quite back to where it was in 2020 (\$9,120), but getting closer with each year. These are signs of generosity!

Esther's report highlighted that both property insurance and property taxes are on the rise – insurance, by 19.18% (\$5,127 [2023] vs. \$4,302 [2022], a \$825 jump), and taxes, by 1.62% (\$2,969.45 [2023] vs. \$2,922.19 [2022], a \$47.26 jump). In addition, our costs for lawn care went up in 2023: mowing, by 4.0% (\$3,250 [2023] vs. \$3,125 [2022]), and treatments from TruGreen, by 6.5% (\$1,142.05 [2023] vs. \$1,072.38 [2022]); however, we didn't spend any money on snow removal in 2023. Also, our fuel costs decreased overall by -15.49% (\$4,677.44 [2023] vs. \$5,535.01 [2022]). This was mainly because of a significant (-55.5%) drop in propane expenses (\$635.11 [2023] vs. \$1,427.17 [2022]) and a slight (-3.5%) dip in heating oil expenses (\$2,495.16 [2023] vs. \$2,585.78 [2022]), more than compensating for a 1.65% rise in electricity expenses (\$1,547.17 [2023] vs. \$1,522.06 [2022]).

The biggest story which Esther highlighted was in repair-related costs. Although 2022 had seen these nearly cut in half compared to 2021, that trend reversed in 2023 with a 151.99% rise in repairs over the prior year (\$3,894.13 [2023] vs. \$1,545.38 [2022] vs. \$3,011.20 [2021]). This, Esther explained, was almost entirely due to two projects: the light panel replacement (\$1,700) and the stained glass repairs (\$1,500), of which we had had four larger ones and two smaller ones repaired last year. Upon the motion of Dave Rissler, as seconded by Del Ream, the financial report was adopted by the congregation.

The congregation then heard a report from the trustees, as voiced by Floyd Mast. The trustees are, per our church bylaws, responsible to provide for the management, repair, and protection of church property; to inspect property annually so as to report its condition at the congregational meeting; and to negotiate for property's purchase, sale, mortgage, or lease as instructed by the board or congregation. Our 2023 trustees were Floyd Mast, Dave Rissler, Ian Pammer, and Barry Ream. In the trustees' January 2023 report, stated goals for the year 2023 had included: selling lumber; fixing the stained-glass windows; leveling the ground where the old parsonage stood; switching to LED lights in the fellowship hall; replacing the grill's exhaust fan; and renovating the fellowship hall's HVAC system.

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In his report for this year, Floyd expressed his thanks to his fellow trustees and also to other members and friends for assistance with church upkeep. Looking back over the past year, Floyd reported that that trustees had installed LED lights in the fellowship hall, secured the repairs of six stained-glass windows, reinstalled covers over the basement-level church windows (the absence of which had caused mold issues in the cellar), checked the main breaker box for electric load and then labeled the breaker and receptacle boxes, repaired a leaky faucet in the women's restroom, and put up a new bulletin board on the back wall of the church. Floyd thanked those who donated mulch and assisted in laying it down around the church, and he thanked Esther for spraying for weeds in the parking lot. Finally, Floyd also reported that, although a special congregational meeting last year had authorized the trustees to negotiate the sale of some of our real estate, our prospective buyers were unable to make it work, and so the sale did not happen.

Looking ahead to 2024, Floyd on behalf of the trustees announced some upcoming intended projects. The trustees intend to: (1) cut and split more wood to sell at our August auction; (2) replace the grill exhaust fan in the fellowship hall; (3) replace several lights in the cellar; (4) level the ground where the former parsonage was; and (5) to update the fellowship hall's HVAC system with two air-conditioner units just like we have in the church. This, Floyd said, would be the big project for the year, which the trustees believe will be good for the fellowship hall. Upon motion of Esther Stauffer, as seconded by Barry Ream, the trustees' report was accepted and adopted by the congregation.

The congregation likewise heard a report from the stewards, as voiced by Kim Sweigart. The stewards are, per our church bylaws, responsible for providing the material for our communion services; assisting at communion services as the pastor directs; counting church offerings; meeting with the pastor annually to discuss compensation and make recommendations to the board; and assisting in procuring suitable housing for the pastor as needed. Our stewards in 2023 were Esther Stauffer, Joyce Garber, Kim Sweigart, and Brenna Pammer. On their behalf, Kim Sweigart affirmed that the stewards had been carrying out all of their required duties. Additionally, she said, the stewards oversee the coffee and donut hour and the fellowship meals. Upon motion of Dave Rissler, as seconded by Floyd Mast, the stewards' report was accepted and adopted by the congregation.

Lastly, the congregation heard the report submitted by our pastor (*for which, see pages 7-8*). Upon the motion of Del Ream, as seconded by Esther Stauffer, the pastor's report was accepted and adopted by the congregation.

Following the reports, the congregation turned its attention to holding elections. The congregational meeting is the venue at which trustees must be elected. David Rissler's most recent three-year term in the office of trustee had begun at the 2021 congregational meeting, and so was vacated as of this meeting. Upon motion of Kim Sweigart, as seconded by Esther Stauffer, David Rissler was nominated. No other nominations being put forth, the congregation elected **David Rissler** to another three-year term as trustee (January 2024—January 2027).

Additionally, at the January 2023 congregational meeting, Ian Pammer had been elected by the congregation to fill out the remainder of John Eberly's unexpired trustee term, which had begun at the 2021 congregational meeting, and so was vacated as of this meeting. Ian expressed his desire to take some time off from board service so as to better attend to some personal goals. However, Brenna Pammer had expressed to the pastor several months earlier that she had felt she would be able to better serve the church as a trustee than as a steward, the office she had been filling. (In addition, a review of the bylaws indicated that Brenna, at the time of her election, had not yet met the steward eligibility requirement of three years' membership [Article VI, Section 3(a)] – an oversight for which Pastor Jonathan, as the one required by the bylaws to nominate all stewards, was responsible.) Therefore, she affirmed her willingness to step down as a steward in order to succeed Ian as trustee, if that is what the congregation desired. Upon motion of Del Ream, as seconded by Esther Stauffer, Brenna was nominated. No other nominations being put forth, the congregation then elected **Brenna Pammer** to a three-year term as trustee (January 2024—January 2027). The filling of the new steward vacancy for Brenna's unexpired term will be handled in accordance with the bylaws.

The congregation also has the prerogative of electing members-at-large, who also serve on the board while not being a trustee, steward, lay delegate, or other such church office. Upon motion of Kim Sweigart, as seconded by Joyce Garber, **Sharon Mast** and **Del Ream** were both elected as members-at-large for a one-year term.

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(Continued from Page 5, "Annual Congregational Meeting")

Due to the elections held at this meeting, the composition of the board now consists (in alphabetical order) of: Ken Bannon, *alternate lay delegate*; Rev. Jonathan Brown, *pastor*; Rebekah Brown, *lay delegate*; Joyce Garber, *steward*; Floyd Mast, *trustee*; Sharon Mast, *member-at-large*; Brenna Pammer, *trustee*; Barry Ream, *trustee*; Del Ream, *member-at-large*; David Rissler, *trustee*; Esther Stauffer, *steward*; Kim Sweigart, *steward* – 12 board members in all. The February 2024 board meeting will be called upon to seek to fill the steward vacancy (bringing the number back to 13 members) and to reorganize the board, selecting a board president, board vice president, church secretary, and church treasurer for 2024.

No other items of business were presented to the congregation. Upon motion of Esther Stauffer, as seconded by Del Ream, the minutes of this January 2024 congregational meeting were approved without being read back. Finally, upon motion of Barry Ream, as seconded by Dave Rissler, the congregational meeting was adjourned until January 2025. Next year, God willing, a congregational meeting will be held on **Sunday, January 19, 2025.**

Statistical Report (December 2023)

	<u>Worship Service Attendance</u>	<u>Offerings Received</u>
12/03/23	20	\$1,150.00
12/10/23	28	\$635.00
12/17/23	52	\$1,365.00
12/24/23	33	\$2,690.00
<u>12/31/23</u>	<u>27</u>	<u>\$785.00</u>
Average:	32	Total: \$6,625.00

Birthdays (February 2023)

2/1 – Rev. Jonathan Brown	2/3 – Shane Sweigart
2/14 – Jere Messner	2/21 – Jean Hess
	2/26 – Henry Kohl

(Continued from Page 1, "Peering from Pisgah")

For us, then, this month we can reflect on the importance of burying the dead. Last May, we talked about how the Christian tradition came to count seven 'corporal works of mercy.' Burial of the dead was the last of these, following on the heels of feeding the hungry, giving water to the thirsty, clothing the naked, harboring the harborless (whether travelers or homeless people), tending to the sick, and freeing captives or at least visiting prisoners.

Burying the dead – which includes everything necessary for a respectful and reverent funeral and then ongoing care to ensure the opportunity for a peaceful rest in perpetuity – was something the early church was known for. It was observed of the early Christians that "whenever one of their poor passes from the world, each of them – according to his ability – gives heed to him and carefully sees to his burial." The last pagan emperor of Rome complained that one of the biggest draws to Christianity was "their care for the graves of the dead."

Prior to the start of any festivities, some Jewish customs treat Zayin Adar as a day of solemn fasting. Fortunately for us this year, Zayin Adar falls two days after our Ash Wednesday, and so at the onset of Lent. As Christians, the spirit of solemn fasting ought to pervade the entirety of our Lent, as we prepare ourselves for the beauty of Easter. Lent is also, as it turns out, a time to pursue works of mercy. After all, in Isaiah 55:6-7, God is clear as can be that works of mercy are his favorite kind of fasting! So Zayin Adar is wonderfully timed this year as a reminder to us Christians that caring for the dignity of the dead is a work pleasing to the LORD, imitating the LORD God's own care for his faithful servant Moses. Though it was through an angel, perhaps, that the LORD buried Moses, it is through us that the LORD aims to show the same kind of care for our brothers, our sisters, our neighbors.

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Pastor's Report to the Congregational Meeting

Grace and peace to you all from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ, who indwells us by his Holy Spirit! It's been a pleasure and a privilege to have now completed my sixth full calendar year as your pastor, and to begin my seventh. The past year has certainly been a full one for me. I used my vacation time mainly to undergo carpal tunnel surgeries on two occasions – thank you for your forbearance and prayers as I recovered. Now, in addition to pastoring Mt. Culmen, leading the EC Church's Heritage Committee, and serving as the EC Church's National Conference Archivist, I've begun a new journey by returning to school in pursuit of a masters degree in library and information science, specializing in archives, to better serve our denomination. Meanwhile, I'm supporting my wife Rebekah as she works her way through the four exams that will enable her to become a Certified Public Accountant.

Just as I've had a full year personally, so have we as a church. Last year was the rare kind of year with the maximum number of possible Sundays, since both New Year's Day and New Year's Eve fell on a Sunday; and yet we did not miss meeting together a single one of those 53 Sundays in 2023. The last time we didn't have to miss a Sunday was 2018. Now, unfortunately, attendance did decline from last year, a statistical drop of 1.48 people per Sunday, more than reversing our modest gains of the past two years. We now have between 28 and 29 people here on a Sunday morning. But the decrease can be totally explained by the loss this year of the Snader family in the wake of Ray's death on July 17. His death also reduced our church membership by one, from 62 to 61 members on our church rolls. Over the past year, this wasn't balanced by anyone joining church membership, although we have a number in our church family who aren't yet members. If that's you, please do consider joining! And, whether you're a member or not, we encourage you to aim, as so many of you *do* aim, to be here each Sunday your situation allows. That's not because of what we as a church get out of it, but because we believe that “God, through Christ, calls us physically together for the purpose of worshipping him in ways that are impossible when we're apart.” For that reason, we're trying to “adopt and spread a church culture of believing God about church,” and that means making the celebration of the Lord's Day, by gathering to worship, a priority in our lives because it's a priority in God's life.

This past year, there were several goals we pursued, but all were – I hope – in service of what we've called our main goal. Here's the purpose statement we've been working with these past few years: “Mt. Culmen exists... to worship God in such a way as to glimpse his glory, to grow in his grace, and to go forth in his goodness.” Everything we are, everything we do, is meant to be at the service of that purpose for our church.

And so the first goal we have is found in our worship. Last year, we determined that we would be on the lookout for a new piano player to support our singing in worship. Well, we haven't found anyone yet, but that doesn't mean we've given up; we're still looking, so if you know of any possibilities we haven't tried, please let us know. We also have been striving, through our church's preaching ministry, to dig deeper into God's word. In the first five months of last year, our sermons took us on a tour of the spiritual life: how to pray, how to read God's word, examine our lives, confront spiritual obstacles, build better habits, share God's mercy; and we found how all these things work together as we strive to follow Christ to where he is, so that we can see God as he is. Then, the next six months, we went to the beginning of the Bible to study the first two chapters of Genesis. We marveled at the wonders of God's good creation through the summer months, and then in the fall we turned to the special mission we humans have in God's world – how we were meant to live on earth. This year, we're going to continue with the rest of what's known as the Primeval History, up through chapter 11. Because we're going to grapple with sin, its consequences, and how to cope with a fallen world. This year, we'll meet people like Abel, Seth, Enoch, Noah, and look for lessons God wants to teach us by how their lives preview the gospel, shed light on our path, and remind us of our heavenly hope.

So that's the first goal we're going to pursue, to keep meeting God in his word as we worship him here together. The second goal is to better respond to God's word by deepening our prayer together. Even before Pentecost brought the Spirit, we know that the original disciples “*all were steadfastly continuing with one accord in prayer*” (Acts 1:14); that included the regular Jewish prayer hours, which the disciples at Jerusalem could be together each day to pray together. But even after the church had grown, Paul wrote that we should “*continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving*” (Colossians 4:2). Praying together is a foundational reason why the church gathers, and so I'd like us this year to consider new ways to strategically 'continue steadfastly together in prayer' as a church.

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What exactly that looks like, I don't know yet. It's something for us to all discern together. But I am convicted that, while we're a prayerful church already, God is inviting us this year to discover deeper prayer, to be transformed more into a church of united prayer – on Sunday morning and throughout the week. This, I firmly believe, is worth our investment together, because it's what we've come together to do.

Speaking of togetherness, a third goal I want to set before us – another carry-over from prior years – is to strengthen our inner ties as a church. One tool we implemented is a church directory, and now we've streamlined the process of releasing an updated edition each year. Another tool is our card ministry, showing people we care in their times of need. This ministry continues to be executed faithfully, and it definitely has an impact. We also gather for quarterly fellowship meals together, and we've enhanced our church bulletin boards this year – one to let you know church updates, and one where you can post your needs for help or things you want to give away. Let's use these!

Another recurring goal we have is to be more of a presence in our community. We begin with the events we hold at our church that we open to our community, and we've been building these back up after the pandemic. Now we have an annual sausage-and-pancake breakfast with an Easter egg hunt for the kids, a picnic and auction with a concert, two yard sales with soup sales, and a Christmas cantata every year. If you have some other ideas, we're listening! We'd invite you to attend a board meeting – they are open – so we can work on the logistics together. Beyond these regular events, last May we were blessed to be part of the Caernarvon Township Church Tour. Building on that, I'd like to see us this year engage more with our tri-township community around us (East Earl, Caernarvon, Brecknock).

As part of that, last year, we began a collaboration with the Northeastern Lancaster County Food Bank based in Terre Hill, becoming one of twelve sponsoring churches for their invaluable ministry. Not only do we donate as a church twelve times per year, but we volunteer four times on distribution days. This year, I hope we will strengthen our ties with their ministry, becoming faithful supporters of their work with intention, so that we can be the hands and face of Christ to those around us in need. We also continue to be engaged in the work of CrossNet Ministries, and this year I would encourage our church to find newer and deeper ways of supporting them, especially in their programs besides their food pantry. There is so much more they do, and so many more ways we can lend a hand.

We've said before that "as a church, we must be *for* our neighbors in love, in service, and in invitation." In the ways we have helped and are going to help these ministries, and in the events we host not just as fundraisers but as open arms to our neighbors, we are for our neighbors in love and in service. But what about that last part of the line – are we for our neighbors in invitation? Are we for our neighbors with the gospel of Jesus, the good news that saves?

And here's where I see a challenge lain down before us. The truth of the matter is that, little by little, we've seen our numbers shrink here at Mt. Culmen. We have, in the past few years, gained a few new faces – members returning to us after a time away, people finding a family here – but it's a far cry from the picture in Acts of when "*more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women*" (Acts 5:14). The solution here won't come from a program. It will come from relationships. Take a moment and think. Do you know any people, anyone at all, who lives in this general area and who doesn't, so far as you know, go to church on Sunday? Maybe it's a neighbor in your neighborhood. Maybe it's an old friend from school or work. Maybe it's family – a spouse, a sibling, a child, a grandchild. Imagine what could happen if each one of us successfully invited even three people to Mt. Culmen this year, people who are in need – whether they know it or not – of a church home to be present in.

Those, then, are the goals I see before us this year: to learn more from Genesis; to deepen our church's prayer life; to strengthen our inner ties; to continue our service to our neighbors; and to invite our unchurched friends, family, and neighbors to come and see Jesus here at Mt. Culmen – the Jesus who lives and moves in our midst each Lord's Day. I believe that if we pursue these five things this year with an eye toward our bigger purpose, then we will become even more of the church God wants us to be. But I alone can't make it happen. Neither can the board. God must grant the increase, and we must offer our commitment, our gifts. So if you're willing, then please receive this report.

Submitted in the holy name of Jesus,

Rev. Jonathan J. Brown, pastor of Mt. Culmen Evangelical Congregational Church

Upcoming Church Events

- **Food Bank Distribution** – On Thursday, **February 15**, 2024, a group from Mt. Culmen will be volunteering at the Northeastern Lancaster County Food Bank, based out of St. Paul's United Methodist Church (105 West Main Street, Terre Hill). They will be open from 1:00pm to 6:00pm, so if you can help for any portion of that time, please come! We'll help clients select groceries, bag them, and carry them to their cars, along with some restocking of the shelves.

Upcoming Community Events

- **Soup Sale** – On Friday, **February 2**, 2024, from 11:00am until sold out, the Ladies Auxiliary of Caernarvon Fire Company (2145 Main Street, Narvon) will sell quarts of chicken corn soup and ham-and-bean soup at the back of the fire hall to raise funds for the fire company.
- **Breakfast** – On Saturday, **February 3**, 2024, from 6:00am to 10:00am, the Bareville Fire Hall (211 East Main Street, Leola) will host an all-you-can-eat breakfast with pancakes, sausage, bacon, eggs, potatoes, and more, for \$12/adult. Quarts of chicken corn noodle soup will also be sold for \$8/quart.
- **Sweetheart Pancake Breakfast** – On Saturday, **February 10**, 2024, from 8:00am to 11:00am, Garden Spot High School cafeteria (669 East Main Street, New Holland), will provide – for \$12/person – all-you-can-eat breakfast of pancakes, sausage, orange juice, coffee, and a hot chocolate bar! This fundraiser benefits the high school lacrosse teams. Tickets are available at <<https://www.gardenspotlacrosse.com>> or at the door.
- **Ash Wednesday Services** – As always, Lent begins with Ash Wednesday, that holy occasion of penance that brings the biblical injunction to 'repent in ashes' to life. This year, Ash Wednesday is **February 14**, and the following are a few of the local churches that have announced Ash Wednesday services. Consider going!
 - St. John Center Lutheran Church (599 Reading Road, East Earl) – 7:00pm
 - Cedar Grove Presbyterian Church (4833 Division Highway, East Earl) – 7:00pm
 - Trinity Lutheran Church (221 East Main Street, New Holland) – 7:00pm
 - Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church (150 Water Street, New Holland) – 9:00am, noon, 7:00pm
 - St. Thomas Episcopal Church (6251 Morgantown Road, Morgantown) – 7:00pm
- **Lenten Lunches** – Each Thursday in Lent, St. John Center United Church of Christ (432 Reading Road, East Earl) will host a noon lunch in their social hall; these lunches, each with a different speaker, are sponsored by the churches of Terre Hill and Bowmansville. This year's overall theme is the Lord's Prayer. So don't forget to go on **February 15, February 22, February 29**, March 7, March 14, March 21, and March 28.
- **Valley Forge Chorus Concert** – On Saturday, **February 17**, 2024, at 7:00pm in Garden Spot Village Chapel (433 South Kinzer Avenue, New Holland), the Valley Forge Chorus will perform a concert.
- **Yard Sale** – On Saturday, **February 24**, 2024, California EC Church (350 California Road, Morgantown) will be holding a church yard sale starting at 8:00am. Why not go support them?
- **Lift Ev'ry Voice** – On Saturday, **February 24**, 2024, at 7:00pm, in Garden Spot Village Chapel (433 South Kinzer Avenue, New Holland), Servant Stage Company will present *Lift Ev'ry Voice*, a 45-minute program of story and song about black United States history.
- **Community Meal** – On Monday, **February 26**, 2024, from 5:30pm to 6:30pm, CrossNet Ministries will provide a free community meal at their youth center (110 West Franklin Street, New Holland).
- **Birdhouse Auction** – All throughout February, Garden Spot Village will have its Music of the Birds display, where nearly a hundred birdhouses up for auction can be viewed in the village square between the Harvest Table and the Artisans Corner. Bids may be placed online at gsc.gl/gsvbirds24 until February 29 at 1:00pm.
- **All About Birds!** – On Thursday, **February 29**, 2024, from 6:00pm to 7:00pm, at Eastern Lancaster County Library (11 Chestnut Drive, New Holland), Jen Watson will give a presentation about birds, their wonderful lives, and how they fit into our world.
- **Sportsman Banquet** – On Friday, **March 8**, 2024, the Ephrata Area Churches will hold this year's New Holland Sportsman Banquet at Yoder's Restaurant (14 Tower Road, New Holland); doors open at 5:00pm and dinner (featuring broasted chicken, ham balls, potatoes, peas, carrots, pie, ice cream, etc.) served at 6:15pm. This year's speaker is deer biologist C.J. Winand, a columnist for *Bowhunter* magazine. Tickets are limited and may be purchased at www.eventbrite.com by searching "New Holland Sportsman Banquet."

Operation Christmas Child Update

Do you remember this past November, when so many of you filled shoeboxes with gifts to give to children around the world? We can now tell you more of the story! The thirty-three shoeboxes you filled were sent this year to four different countries, and it's wonderful to find out a little bit more about them.



Three of our shoeboxes went to **Honduras**. Taking its name from the Spanish word for 'depths,' this country is located in Central America, with an area over 43,000 square miles. It was once home to the Maya civilization, and after three centuries of Spanish rule (1524-1821), Honduras gained independence, becoming its own republic in 1838. After years of American banana companies exerting considerable control, a coup d'etat in 1963 led to sixteen years of military rule. Once civilian government was restored, a new constitution was approved in 1982. In 2009, the government was again toppled by the military, but now the former president's wife is the country's first female president.

Having suffered considerably from devastating hurricanes in 1974 and 1998, Honduras has recovered and is a noted exporter of coffee. Today their population stands at around 9.5 million, about 75% of whom profess Christianity (almost evenly split between Catholic and Protestant). There remains high crime and exceptional inequality, with over half of the population living in extreme poverty. For this reason, we're glad that Amy Hanna, Amos and Sally Arment, and Dave and Miriam Rissler each filled a shoebox with gifts for a Honduran child this past year.

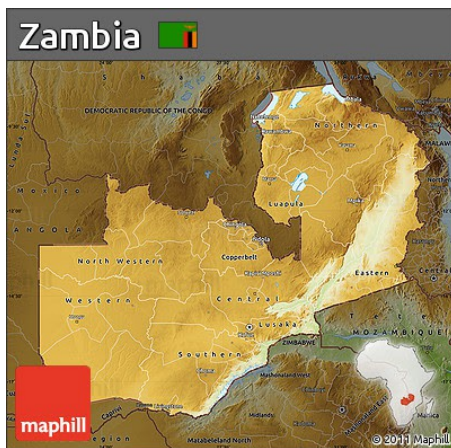
Fifteen of our shoeboxes – nearly half of our total! – went to **Colombia**. Named after Christopher Columbus, it's located at the northwest edge of South America, connected to Panama, where it occupies an area of over 440,000 square miles. Like with Honduras, the earlier populations were conquered by the Spanish in the first half of the 1500s, leading to several centuries of colonial rule, ultimately in the form of the Viceroyalty of New Granada. Several decades before Honduran independence, the people of New Granada seized on the power shifts in Spain (where Napoleon had dethroned the king) to declare independence in July 1810. After years of war, Simon Bolivar was successful in freeing New Granada in 1819. Bolivar created a large state called Gran Colombia, which disintegrated by 1831 into three independent countries: Venezuela, Ecuador, and the Republic of New Granada – which, after taking several other forms through various civil wars, had led to the modern Republic of Colombia by 1886. Numerous other civil wars were fought in its history, including a major one in the 1950s ended only by a short season of military dictatorship.



In the 1960s, various communist and anti-communist militia groups emerged, urged on by Cold War superpowers like the United States and the Soviet Union; meanwhile, in this divided country, drug cartels rose in influence. The past few decades have seen a new constitution and a peace process, bringing more stability. Colombia today has a population around 52 million, 87% of whom profess Christianity (mainly Catholic), but has an exceptionally high crime rate. The ongoing fight between the government and various militias and crime syndicates will reach sixty years this coming May, although thanks to efforts since 2011, the homicide rate has fallen to sixteenth in the world – better than Honduras, which has the world's eighth highest homicide rate. (The United States is fifty-fifth.)

Colombia is usually regarded as a middle-income country, with one of the largest economies in South America, but it is considered one of the most unequal countries in the world, with minimal financial assistance available to the poor, so that a majority of Colombian families are food insecure, with one in eight Colombians living on less than \$2 a day. We're thankful that Shirley Good, Lee and Martha Stoltzfus, Floyd and Sharon Mast, Joyce Garber, Pastor Jonathan and Rebekah Brown, Cindy Ruth, Leon and Jean Hess, Amos and Sally Arment, Esther Stauffer, Yvonne Styer, Anita Boley, Ian and Brenna Pammer, and Barry and Del Ream packed shoeboxes for Colombian children this past year. (Three of the Reams' shoeboxes were sent to children in Colombia.)

(Continued on Page 11)



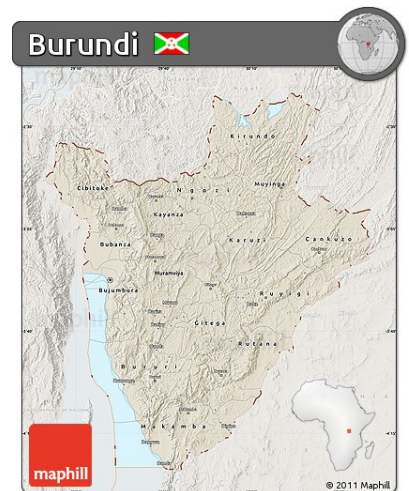
Another ten of our shoeboxes were sent to **Zambia**, a landlocked country in south-central Africa with an area over 290,000 square miles. This land, marked by the Zambezi River that begins there and marks its border with Zimbabwe to the south, once belonged to a succession of African kingdoms through the frequent migrations once common there.

By the 1800s, European visitors began to arrive, including the missionary David Livingstone, who died there in 1873. Before the century had ended, the British South Africa Company led by Cecil Rhodes had taken power, turning the region into several protectorates, two of which were merged in 1911 into Northern Rhodesia. In 1923, the company ceded control of this Northern Rhodesia directly to the British government.

After controversially grouping Northern Rhodesia into a colonial federation in 1953, widespread protests fed into a national independence movement led by Harry Nkumbula and Kenneth Kaunda. In January 1964, Kaunda – encouraged by the colonial governor – was elected Northern Rhodesia's prime minister. He succeeded in securing a formal grant of independence by that October, and so Northern Rhodesia became the Republic of Zambia at last.

This new nation struggled, especially as its major export (copper) began to decline in value. Meanwhile, Kaunda, as its first president, managed to suppress all opposition for decades, remaining in power until 1991, when, in the face of protests, he conceded to genuine elections and, when defeated, surrendered power peacefully. Zambia is now a highly urbanized country with over 20 million people, of whom between 82% and 95% profess Christianity, mainly charismatic forms of Protestantism; and its constitution proclaims it officially to be a Christian nation. The Zambian economy has stabilized, but about half the population lives below their national poverty line. We're glad that Barry and Del Ream, Anita Boley, Yvonne Styer, Amos and Sally Arment, Kim Sweigart, Leon and Jean Hess, Shirley Good, Joyce Good, Joyce Garber, and Ken Bannon each packed a shoebox for a Zambian child! Pastor Jonathan and Rebekah, who last year met the Zambian ambassador to the United States (and invited him to visit Mt. Culmen if he's ever in the area), believe that the ambassador would be pleased with our church's giving.

Finally, the last five of our shoeboxes were sent to **Burundi**, a landlocked country in central Africa, south of Rwanda, with an area of less than 11,000 square miles. Once the Kingdom of Burundi, the land has long been home to a variety of ethnic groups. But in the late 1800s, the area was taken over by the German Empire, which incorporated Burundi into a colony called German East Africa. After World War I, this territory was surrendered to the Belgians. In 1959, King Mwambutsa IV petitioned the Belgian government to grant them independence, and arranged for elections to be held in 1961. His son won the presidency, but was promptly assassinated. In the wake of this tragedy, Burundi claimed its independence in 1962 as a constitutional monarchy. By 1966, however, the prime minister had overthrown the monarchy and established a socialist military dictatorship. Meanwhile, ethnic tensions between Tutsis and Hutus led – just as in neighboring Rwanda – to several genocides: first of Hutus by Tutsis in 1972, then of Tutsis by Hutus in 1993, which began a twelve-year civil war until 2005.



These genocides and civil wars are especially tragic considering that, of the present population of over 13 million, over 93% of the people profess Christianity (mainly Catholic). The present century has so far seen an uneasy peace in Burundi, albeit with serious human rights violations by the government. A more rural country almost wholly devoted to subsistence agriculture, Burundi remains among the world's poorest and the world's unhappiest nations. In a land facing such severe challenges, it's especially good that Kim Sweigart, Deb Kimmel, Pastor Jonathan and Rebekah Brown, Ian and Brenna Pammer, and Leon and Jean Hess packed shoeboxes for Burundian children!

(Continued from Page 6, "Peering from Pisgah")

Second, there are the prayers traditionally offered up on this day, taken especially from three select verses in Psalms. The first is from Psalm 36:6 (*"Your righteousness is like the mountains of God; your judgments are like the great deep: man and beast you save, O LORD"*). The second is from Psalm 71:19 (*"Your righteousness, O God, reaches the high heavens; you who have done great things, O God, who is like you?"*). And the third is from Psalm 119:142 (*"Your righteousness is righteous forever, and your law is true"*).

What do all these have in common? They show us that, even though Moses has died – which, for Israel, must have been an incredible trauma – the LORD is a living God! God's righteousness is greater than the person of Moses. God's teaching (literally, *torah*) is greater than the person of Moses. Moses may fall short of journeying with Israel into their inheritance, but God's righteousness and God's instruction cannot fall short. They are eternal, outlasting any life in this world. In the end, even when it comes to the great Moses, Jeremiah's message would have to hold true: *"Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength"* (Jeremiah 17:5). Insofar as Moses was mortal, Israel could depend on God's work through him in his life, but could not pin all their hopes on his person; they had to understand the reasons for hope after he was gone. God will still do great things, still uphold the truth of his word, still have righteousness that dwarfs all our puny sins, over the long stretch of post-Moses history.

But for us, as Christians, we have an incredible privilege. *"Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant..., but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son"* (Hebrews 3:5-6). Jesus, the promised Messiah, *"has been counted as worthy of more glory than Moses"* (Hebrews 3:3), *"and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses"* (Acts 13:39). Unlike those who *"have set their hope"* on Moses (John 5:45), we trust the eternal ministry of Jesus the Messiah, who came as Righteousness (1 Corinthians 1:30) *"so that in him we might become the righteousness of God"* (2 Corinthians 5:21). We celebrate Jesus, we hope in Jesus, because where Moses died and was buried and is still waiting to rise on the last day, Jesus died and was buried and was raised to glory as the Savior-Son who lives indestructibly forever! And so *"he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them"* (Hebrews 7:25).

Third, we can look to the moments before Moses died. After his final sermon, there took place the commissioning of Moses to succeed Moses. The commissioning came directly from the LORD (Deuteronomy 30:23), but ultimately it took effect later because *"Moses had laid his hands on him"* (Deuteronomy 34:9). Then Moses wrote out the Law and had it placed next to the Ark of the Covenant. He taught Israel a special song and counseled them to be scrupulously faithful to every word of the Law. And *"that very day, the LORD spoke to Moses: 'Go up this mountain of the Abarim, Mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab opposite Jericho, and view the land of Canaan which I am giving to the people of Israel for a possession. And die on the mountain which you go up...'"* (Deuteronomy 32:48-50). In obedience, *"then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is opposite Jericho. And the LORD showed him all the land, Gilead as far as Dan, all Naphtali, the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the western sea, the Negeb, and the Plain, that is, the Valley of Jericho the city of palm trees, as far as Zoar. And the LORD said to him: 'This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob: 'I will give it to your offspring'"* (Deuteronomy 34:1-4).

This scene, of Moses' final mountaintop view of the Promised Land, has a deeper significance than just the historical event. The Promised Land is taken in the New Testament as symbolic of *"the promised eternal inheritance"* that awaits God's new-covenant people (Hebrews 9:15), *"an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you"* (1 Peter 1:4). Even now, we have the Holy Spirit *"as a guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it"* (Ephesians 1:14). What separated the Israelites standing in the plains of Moab from actually setting foot in the Promised Land was the Jordan River; this is what they would eventually have to wade across in order to get into the Promised Land. Just so, what separates us standing in this life from actually setting foot in our inheritance is the death of the body; this is what we will eventually have to wade across. What, then, is represented by Moses climbing a mountain and viewing the Promised Land from the far side? For us, this is like a sort of glimpse into heaven, whether in prayer or in contemplation at the point of death, as we prepare to cross.

(Continued on Page 13)

(Continued from Page 12, "Peering from Pisgah")

This theme, this imagery, shows up in a lot of hymns by a lot of different authors. John William Dadmun wrote in a hymn: "Come, all ye saints, to Pisgah's mountain, / come view your home beyond the tide: / the land we love is just before us, / soon we'll be on the other side." Fanny J. Crosby wrote similar sentiments: "Joyful away to Pisgah's mountain, / borne on the wings of faith we soar; / sweetly we hear the echo ringing, / happy voices on the other shore." And we all know the hymn "Sweet Hour of Prayer" by William Walford, #444 in our hymnal, which itself includes the lines: "Till, from Mount Pisgah's lofty height, / I view my home and take my flight."

Benjamin Beddome uses this scene too: "Ascend, my soul, to Pisgah's hill, / which overlooks the promised land; / go view from thence the fertile fields, / and there with joy and wonder stand." So does Sarah F. Adams: "Arise, my soul, to Pisgah's height, / and view the promised land; / and see by faith the glorious sight, / our heritage at hand, // a land where pure enjoyments dwell, / and blessings most divine, / where saints their highest notes shall swell / and in bright glory shine." Even Charles Wesley gets into the game, in his hymn "O Joyful Sound of Gospel Grace," which says: "The promised land from Pisgah's top / I now exult to see; / my hope is full, O glorious hope, of immortality."

But my personal favorite is from Isaac Watts' hymn "There is a Land of Pure Delight," sadly left out of our hymnal:

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 There is a land of pure delight
where saints immortal reign,
infinite day excludes the night,
and pleasures banish pain. | 4 But timorous mortals start and shrink
to cross this narrow sea,
and linger shivering on the brink
and fear to launch away. |
| 2 There everlasting spring abides,
and never-withering flowers;
death like a narrow sea divides
this heav'nly land from ours. | 5 Oh, could we but our doubts remove,
these gloomy doubts that arise,
and see the Canaan that we love
with unobscured eyes! |
| 3 Sweet fields beyond the swelling flood
stand dressed in living green:
so to the Jews old Canaan stood,
while Jordan rolled between. | 6 Could we but climb where Moses stood,
and view the landscape o'er,
not Jordan's stream nor death's cold flood
should fright us from the shore! |

Better than all the other hymns, I think this one captures what Moses peering from Pisgah really signifies to us who believe in God's Messiah Jesus: that the frightful river of death may fill us "timorous mortals" with doubt and fear from our earthbound perspective, but if we could just get a clear glimpse at the glory that awaits us, if we could only understand the "land of pure delight" on the other side, then why would we "linger shivering on the brink"? Why would we "fear to launch away"? We would, instead, gladly brave "death's cold flood" when our time comes.

Isaac Watts' original title for this hymn was "A Prospect of Heaven Makes Death Easy." And isn't that the truth? So why, then, don't we seek such a 'prospect' more often? Why don't we send our faith climbing up Pisgah to catch our peek? I was talking with one of you recently about how valuable it is to set our minds on things above, where Christ is (Colossians 3:1-2). Of course, we know that *"while the promise of entering still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it"* (Hebrews 4:1). *"Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall"* (1 Corinthians 10:12). *"See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God!"* (Hebrews 12:15). *"Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience"* (Hebrews 4:11).

Moses was told, *"I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not go over there"* (Deuteronomy 34:4). He saw the view from Pisgah, but didn't enter it himself. We must remember that it's not the view into the land, not our heart set on heaven, that gets us there. Moses was ultimately excluded *"because you broke faith with me... and because you did not treat me as holy in the midst of the people of Israel"* (Deuteronomy 32:51). It's keeping faith with God, it's treating him as holy with our lives, then, that will translate our Pisgah view into the sweet fields beneath our feet. And so, if we are faithful in all God's House under Christ, we will receive what we hope for! May none of us fail to peer from Pisgah; may none of us shrink back from the river in between; may none of us fail to enter. Amen.

Preaching Calendar (February – March 2024)

Worship services commence at 10:00 AM on Sundays. We hope to see you there with us!

- February 4 (Sexagesima):** Sermon Title: “Useful, Pretty, Profitable, Toxic”
Scripture Reading: Genesis 3:1-6
“O Jesus, I Have Promised” (496)
“Do You Love the World?” (insert)
- February 11 (Quinquagesima):** Sermon Title: “Shame and the Blame Game”
Scripture Reading: Genesis 3:6-13
“Softly and Tenderly Jesus is Calling” (263)
“On Man, in His Own Image Made” (insert)
- February 18 (Quadragesima [Lent 1]):** Sermon Title: “Curses!”
Scripture Reading: Genesis 3:7-19
“All Mankind Fell in Adam's Fall” (insert)
“When the Curse is Lifted” (insert)
- February 25 (Lent 2):** Sermon Title: “The Burning Blade at Our Backs”
Scripture Reading: Genesis 3:21-24
“Eden Fair and Bright” (insert)
“O Paradise, O Paradise” (insert)
- March 3 (Lent 3):** Sermon Title: “The First Gospel”
Scripture Reading: Genesis 3:14-15
“When by the Tempter's Wiles Betrayed” (insert)
“Deceived by Subtle Snares of Hell” (insert)
- March 10 (Laetare Sunday [Lent 4]):** As Pastor Jonathan will be on vacation, we will have a guest preacher.
More information about the service will be forthcoming.
“What Can Wash Away My Sin?” (254)
“Amazing Grace” (278)
- March 17 (Lent 5):** Sermon Title: “Skins and Sins and Sons; or, Restating the World”
Scripture Reading: Genesis 3:20–4:2
“Come, Ye Sinners, Poor and Needy” (268 – vv. 1, 4)
“Come, Every Soul by Sin Oppressed” (267)
- March 24 (Palm Sunday):** Sermon Title: “The Dawn of Sacrifice”
Scripture Reading: Genesis 4:1-4
“All Glory, Laud, and Honor” (124)
“Is Your All on the Altar?” (insert)
- March 31 (Easter Sunday):**
(Communion) Sermon Title: “Passing Over to Faith”
Scripture Reading: Exodus 12:21-27 + 1 Peter 1:14-21
“The Day of Resurrection” (160)
“Ye Choirs of New Jerusalem” (insert)
- April 7 (Easter 2):** Sermon Title: “Counsel for Cain”
Scripture Reading: Genesis 4:1-7
“Beset with Snares on Every Hand” (insert)
“Out of My Bondage, Sorrow, and Night” (272)

Quotes for Thought

“For eighty-six years I have been [Christ's] servant, and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme against my King and Savior? ... If you pretend not to know who I am, listen and I will tell you plainly: I am a Christian. And if you would like to learn the doctrine of Christianity, set aside a day and listen. ... It is good to change from what is wicked to righteousness. ... The fire you threaten me with burns merely for a time and is soon extinguished. It is clear you are ignorant of the fire of everlasting punishment and of the judgment that is to come, which awaits the impious. Why, then, do you hesitate? Come, do what you will.”

– St. Polycarp of Smyrna, to the judge at his trial,
just before being burned at the stake on February 23

The Martyrdom of Polycarp 9-11 (c. AD 160), in H. Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford Univ. Pr., 1972), 9-11

“Do not, then, put off moral improvement, but act now. Do not abandon your gift altogether because it is small in value. Just make your offering and at the same time wish in your heart that it could be more, and ask indulgence for your slender means. ... Let each person offer God the gift that is appropriate and in accordance with his means: the sinner, repentance; the upright, strength of character; the young, self-discipline; the old, wisdom; the rich man, generosity; the pauper, gratitude; the magistrate, humility; the tax collector, lenience.”

– St. Gregory of Nazianzus
Oration 19.9 (c. AD 374), in *Fathers of the Church: A New Translation* 107:100

“By fasting as by a sword, all the demons are routed, because they cannot bear nor do they have strength against its delight. They love pleasure-seekers and drunkards, but if they see the face of fasting, they cannot hold their ground, but flee far away, as Christ our God teaches us when he says: *'The race of demons is vanquished by fasting and prayer'* [**Mark 9:29**]. And so we have been taught that fasting gives people eternal life.”

– St. Romanos the Melodist
On Fasting 3 (c. AD 550), in *Popular Patristics Series* 61:49

“Where the zeal of a fervent spirit has been kindled, old age does not grow indolent in devotion to a good work, but... divine love moves aged limbs onward through the contest of spiritual warfare. For we who *'have not here a lasting city, but seek one that is yet to come'* [**Hebrews 13:14**], ought not hope for rest in any period of life here. ... Remain steadfast in fraternal love. Join forces unanimously in the devotion of mutual love against the snares of the ancient enemy. Let the whole frame of your holy way of living raise itself on the foundations of love...”

– St. Peter Damian
Letter 153.90-91, to an abbot (c. AD 1068), in *Fathers of the Church: Medieval Continuation* 7:68-69

“With respect to your present leisure..., you cannot have a better employment of it than that of sifting, as it were, the contents of the Bible. There is so much in it which does not appear at first sight, the different books have such an intimate relation with each other and throw on one another so much unexpected light, that life is not sufficient for a perfect view of the comprehensive subject they treat on. ... Scripture contains an inexhaustible mine of divine treasures ... As we read, we see more and more of a majesty, a sublimity, a holiness, an awful grandeur, which, while it affects the heart, subdues the will and convinces the understanding.”

– St. John Henry Newman
Letter to Simon Lloyd Pope, dated 18 February 1824, in *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman* 1:171

“Can the Golden Rule supplant the Rule of Gold? ... Frontiers have bristled with bayonets, and great armies and navies have marched and maneuvered before the god Mars in the effort to hold and add to national territories and trade. The Great War disillusioned men, but it hasn't broken the spell of selfishness. ... The trouble with the Golden Rule is that it seems too high, too exacting for daily living. ... But the only way to reach the heights is to strive for the stars. Jesus calls us from our lower selves to our better selves, from the thought of greedy gain to generous giving, from self-seeking to the services of others. He takes us where we are and as we are, and would have us become in fact what we are in potentiality: sons of God.”

– Robert J. Pilgram, pastor of St. Peter's Reformed Church, Lancaster
“A Sermon for Today: The Golden Rule,” Lancaster *Sunday News* (10 February 1924): 17

PRAYER GUIDE

- *We praise God* for all the wondrous blessings he's given us, most notably the ministry of his Son (in death, resurrection, and exaltation to the Father's right hand) and the gift of his Holy Spirit; and *we pray* that God would glorify his name above all else and would bring his kingdom more fully to earth.
- *We pray for our denomination, our congregation, and the church universal*, that God would bless us at all levels with faithfulness, wisdom, vision, and fortitude to earnestly labor in his vineyard.
 - *We pray particularly for* our pastor **Rev. Jonathan J. Brown** and for **our church board**.
 - *We pray also for* **our Evangelical Congregational Church leadership**: our bishop **Randy Sizemore**, executive director **Kevin Henry**, and district field director **Keith Miller**; the **Global Ministries Community** under **Ted Rathman**; the **Kingdom Extension Community** under **Mike Snedeker**; the **Church Health Community** under **Gary Kuehner**; the **Missional Alignment Community** under **Bishop Randy Sizemore**; and the **Ministerial Development Community** under **Matthew Hill**.
- *We pray for our missionary partners* (such as **Dan Quigley** and others), that God would keep them safe and faithful, would focus their efforts on God's work, and would grant success in accordance with his holy will.
- *We pray for other churches and pastors in our community*, that God would keep all congregations united in one holy faith and devoted to the ardent service of one and the same kingdom and of its King, Jesus.
- *We pray for the salvation of our whole community and its maturation in Christian discipleship*, knowing that there is hope in Jesus for all people and for entire communities to reflect the righteous love of God.
- *We pray for an end to disease outbreaks*: COVID-19, mpox, cholera, dengue, diphtheria, anthrax, flu, RSV.
- *We pray for those suffering in the wake of disasters around the world*, that God would have mercy:
 - *We pray for* those afflicted by natural disasters such as famine; storms in the United States; flooding in Brazil; landslides in Colombia, Philippines, and China; earthquakes in Japan and China; etc.
 - *We pray for* those afflicted by accidents such as helicopter crashes in Uganda and Canada; plane crashes in Chile, the Grenadines, Afghanistan, Canada, and Brazil; the hot-air balloon crash in Arizona; bus/truck accidents in Brazil, Mongolia, Czechia, Mexico; the train accident in Indonesia; boat accidents in England, India, Mexico; pile-ups in Guinea and Afghanistan; mine accidents in China, Tanzania, Mali; explosions in Thailand and Nigeria; fires in Austria, Germany, China; and the hangar collapse in Idaho.
- *We pray also for those victimized by violence and social ills, especially the Israel-Hamas war and Russian invasion of Ukraine*, that God would make his peace manifest to the injured, traumatized, and grieving.
 - *We pray additionally for* those afflicted by the Uyghur genocide in China; civil war in Syria, Somalia, Yemen, Sudan, Myanmar, etc.; India-Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan, and Armenia-Azerbaijan conflicts; insurgency in Egypt, Colombia, Chad, Cameroon, Congo, the Maghreb, Nigeria, Niger, India, Burkina Faso, Uganda, Mozambique, Pakistan, South Sudan, Turkey, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Peru, and Libya; gang/cartel wars in Mexico, Ecuador, and Haiti; kidnappings; protest-related violence around the world; airstrikes in Ukraine, Israel, Gaza, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, Pakistan, and elsewhere; mass shootings in Pakistan, Puerto Rico, Trinidad, Niger, Iowa, Illinois; shootouts in Ecuador, Mexico, the Philippines, and elsewhere; stabbings in South Korea, Japan, and Israel; bombings in Iran, Afghanistan, Somalia, Congo, and elsewhere; ambushes in Mali, Nigeria, and elsewhere; the arson attack in Ecuador; riots in Ecuador, Papua New Guinea, and Comoros; massacres in Nigeria, Pakistan, Sudan, and elsewhere; the vehicle-ramming attack in Israel; the humanitarian crisis in Gaza; vandalism and attacks on churches; the American opioid epidemic; human rights violations (e.g., abortion and human trafficking); the rising wave of antisemitism and other ideologies of hatred; and the refugee crisis.
- *We pray for* all who serve and protect us, including **civic leaders, police, firefighters, medical responders, and members of the military**: May God keep them safe, just, wise, sincere, humble, and accountable.
- *We pray for our nation and its government* at all levels and in all branches, that God would move our leaders to repent of unjust or unmerciful practices and laws; that God would crown them with wisdom, security, peace, and civility toward all; and that God would give them godly hearts to live and govern rightly.
- *We pray for the persecutors and maligners of the church around the world*:
 - *We pray for* the conversion of terrorists and other people of violence into disciples of the Prince of Peace.
 - *We pray for* the wisdom of God to be made manifest to skeptics and critics.
 - *We pray for* the Spirit's boldness to fill the hearts of all believers to witness to Jesus in life and in death.

PRAYER GUIDE

- *We pray for the families and friends of many who have entered their rest in the past year, including:*
 - For the family of **Mike Diem**, who entered rest on February 8, 2023.
 - For the family of **Alvin Wise** (Jean Hess' uncle), who entered rest on February 22, 2023.
 - For the family of **Grace Sprecher** (Sharon Mast's aunt), who entered rest on February 22, 2023.
 - For the family of **Herman Martin**, who entered rest on February 25, 2023.
 - For the families of **Leon Hartranft** and **Amanda Hoffert**, who entered rest on March 11, 2023.
 - For the family of **Lois Gift**, who entered rest on March 20, 2023.
 - For the family of **William Riegel** (Del Ream's brother-in-law), who entered rest on March 27, 2023.
 - For the family of **Darryl Imler** (Leroy Stoltzfus' nephew), who entered rest on April 1, 2023.
 - For the family of **Glenn Weber**, who entered rest on April 4, 2023.
 - For the family of **Clarence Jones** (Floyd Mast's uncle), who entered rest on April 11, 2023.
 - For the family of **Linda Wonder** (Sharon Mast's stepmother), who entered rest on April 27, 2023.
 - For the family of **John Herr** (Abby Eberly's friend), who entered rest on April 29, 2023.
 - For the family of **Sherry Stoltzfus** (Esther's sister-in-law's mother), who entered rest on May 4, 2023.
 - For the family of **Jim Brubaker**, who entered rest on May 5, 2023.
 - For the family of **Clarence Bauman** (Joyce Good's brother), who entered rest on June 17, 2023.
 - For the family of **Ben Schweitzer** (Kim Sweigart's son-in-law's friend), who entered rest July 10, 2023.
 - For the family of **Mary Martin** (Abby Eberly's friend's sister), who entered rest on July 15, 2023.
 - For the family of **Ray Snader**, who entered rest on July 17, 2023.
 - For the family of **John Kendig** (Sharon Mast's brother-in-law), who entered rest on July 19, 2023.
 - For the family of **Mary Skiba** (Sally Arment's cousin), who entered rest on August 20, 2023.
 - For the family of **Ivan Zimmerman** (Ray Snader's brother-in-law), who entered rest on August 22, 2023.
 - For the family of **Della Bollinger** (Floyd Mast's aunt), who entered rest on August 27, 2023.
 - For the family of **Harley Steenhoek** (the Walkers' grandpa), who entered rest on September 2, 2023.
 - For the family of **Elsie Martin** (Jean Hess's great-aunt), who entered rest on September 8, 2023.
 - For the family of **Clarence Good** (Jean Hess's uncle), who entered rest on September 13, 2023.
 - For the family of **Luke Ringler** (Abby's son-in-law's brother), who entered rest on September 25, 2023.
 - For the family of **Pat Street** (Nancy Mountz's sister), who entered rest on September 27, 2023.
 - For the family of **Daniel Newswanger** (Mabel's husband), who entered rest on October 8, 2023.
 - For the family of **Joyce Martin** (Jean Hess's cousin), who entered rest on October 11, 2023.
 - For the family of **Shirley Riggins** (Deb Messner's mother), who entered rest on October 13, 2023.
 - For the family of **Titus Burkholder** (Leon Hess's cousin), who entered rest on October 16, 2023.
 - For the family of **Erwin Sensenig Jr.** (Sally Arment's brother), who entered rest on November 7, 2023.
 - For the family of **Henrietta Hoshauer**, who entered rest on November 18, 2023.
 - For the family of **Bob Schade** (Cindy Ruth's uncle), who entered rest on November 23, 2023.
 - For the family of **Harvey Sauder**, who entered rest on November 25, 2023.
 - For the family of **David Kulp**, who entered rest on November 27, 2023.
 - For the family of **Bill Sprecher** (Sharon Mast's uncle), who entered rest on December 4, 2023.
 - For the family of **April Shirk** (Joan Swayze's daughter), who entered rest on December 7, 2023.
 - For the family of **Evaleen Weinhold** (Joan Swayze's aunt), who entered rest on December 16, 2023.
 - For the family of **Larry Fisher** (Abby Eberly's cousin's husband), who entered rest December 29, 2023.
 - For the family of **Dot Yohn** (Shirley's daughter's mother-in-law), who entered rest on January 3, 2024.
 - For the family of **Jace London** (Cindy Ruth's neighbor's great-grandson), who entered rest Jan. 19, 2024.
 - For the family of **Lori Zimmerman**, who entered rest on January 19, 2024.
 - For the family of **Eugene Martin** (Esther Stauffer's uncle), who entered rest on January 19, 2024.
 - For the family of **Donna Rhodes** (Cindy Ruth's sister-in-law), who entered rest on January 21, 2024.
 - May the Lord give immeasurable peace, strength, and comfort to all who face loss and grief.

PRAYER GUIDE

- *We pray for all dementia sufferers* and for **their caretakers**, that God would lighten burdens, restore clarity to injured minds, and speak directly to hearts and souls with his comfort, his peace, and the light of grace.
- *We pray for all suffering from cancer* – (including Randy Vandill, Cindy Ebersole, Troy Frey, Lisa Mast, Sue Stoltzfus [Lee and Martha's daughter-in-law], Betty Kennedy [Del Ream's niece-in-law], Earl Martin [Miriam Rissler's brother-in-law], Brandy Rhodes [Pastor Jonathan's cousin], Doris Snader, Gene Sensenig, Adrienne Hedges [Brenna Pammer's friend], Rev. Marlin Lafferty, Rev. Don Wert, etc.) – that God shield them from pain, restore and comfort them, and bless their doctors.
- *We pray for the other assorted health concerns (and other needs) of:*
 - Earl and Pauline Good + John Good (Earl's brother) + David Good
 - Floyd Mast + Steven Mast (Floyd's son) + Cindy Bannon + Marilyn Wilson (Cindy's mother)
 - Barry Ream + Delores Jaxel + Clair Kohl + Jeff Kohl + Henry Kohl + Shawn and Candace Sweigart
 - Cherri Snader + Jim Becker + Larry and Cookie White + Grayson Sweigart (Kim's grandson)
 - Linda Burkholder + Mary Andrews + Raymond Bannon
 - Barty Messner + Edna Binner + Shannon Messner
 - Vera Kochel + Brandon Wilson + Floyd Heuyard
 - Violet Stauffer + Paul Ford + Betty Musser + Ed Diem
 - Jerry Felpel and Doris Getz + Dawn Acevedo (Cindy Hoffer's sister)
 - Josh Kendig (Sharon Mast's son) + Connie Dieter (Leon and Jean Hess's daughter)
 - Larsen Houck (Shirley Good's great-grandson) + Kayley Smith (the Hesses' granddaughter)
 - Kathryn Shirk (Jean Hess's aunt) + Sonya Shirey (Jean's friend) + Dennis Wanner
 - Ray Arment + Butch and Mike Skiba + Emily Sensenig + Jeannine Sensenig
 - Sharon Geib (Deb Kimmel's sister) + Cassie Geib (Sharon Geib's mother-in-law)
 - Veanna Baxter + Julia Reed (Veanna's sister) + Shirley Buchanan
 - Jeremy Kurman + Warren Weinhold + Jody Freeman
 - Jess Pennepacker + Charles Yingst + Ralph Mountz
 - Carl and Grace Nolt + Don Pickle + Carl Martin
 - Robert and Barbara Sparr + Rodger Whittaker
 - Abby Eberly + Linda Sweitzer (Abby's friend)
 - Elizabeth Zimmerman (John Eberly's sister)
 - Dorothy Long (Sharon Mast's boss's sister)
 - Madelynne Walker + Ben + Tim
 - Gloria Hoffman + Minerva Hufford
 - Troy Frey and both of his parents + Tory Lingg
 - Ken Keen and Nancy Fox (Floyd Mast's friends)
 - Donna Sensenig + Larry Sensenig + Daryll Sensenig
 - Bob Buckwalter (Abby Eberly's friend's husband)
 - Alice Vidzicki (Deb Kimmel's friend's mother)
 - Delores, Jeremiah, and Bobby Snader + Ben Doullin + Shirley Sweigart
 - Carol Briggs (Ruth Snader's sister) + Ken Cochran (Ruth's cousin-in-law)
 - Linda Talbot (Cindy Ruth's sister) + Tom Schwer (Sharon Mast's stepbrother)
 - Cathy Bullock (Cindy Ruth's neighbor) + Ken Styer + Bret Hoffert + Jethro Hursh
 - Rebecca Lucas (the Walkers' family friend) + Rebecca Horst + Dillon Dewire + Barb Kern
- *We pray for other neighbors, friends, and believers in need*, that God would heal, provide, and comfort.
- *We pray for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit* upon our church, our community, our county, our nation, the Evangelical Congregational Church, and the church universal. *We pray for the whole church to be filled with a spiritual zeal for worship, evangelism, and discipleship. May the fires of revival fall!*
- *We praise God for all the prayers we've seen him answer and for his everlasting faithfulness!*